

**TeamOCEAN Kayaker Education Program
For the
Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary**



**Season Evaluation Report
Summer 2001**



Submitted by
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The TeamOCEAN Kayaker Education Program (TeamOCEAN) for the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary (MBNMS) is a seasonal program that provides face-to-face interpretation of MBNMS natural history and Sanctuary regulations. The target audience is primarily ocean kayakers, but includes other Sanctuary resource users who may be encountered on the water, such as boaters and divers. Ocean kayakers are one of the Sanctuary's fastest growing and most under reached user groups. A large percentage of ocean kayakers are visitors to the area and are unaware of or undereducated about the Sanctuary's existence and sensitive wildlife. The TeamOCEAN Kayak Education program was piloted in the fall of 2000 with the goals of increasing outreach within the ocean kayaking community, minimizing kayak-related disturbances to marine wildlife through education on sensitive species and the purpose or need for existing Sanctuary protections, while providing an increased on-the-water presence for the Sanctuary. The summer of 2001 was TeamOCEAN's second season in the MBNMS.

I. EVALUATION OF THE 2001 TeamOCEAN PROGRAM

A. Staffing and Recruitment

Recruitment for four seasonal contractors to staff the TeamOCEAN program began in April 2001. We experienced a variety of problems, including errors by WASC and ourselves, and initiated three separate recruitment rounds before successfully contracting with three highly qualified individuals in mid-July 2001. This delay necessitated that the program's starting date be postponed from May 15 to July 30, 2001. Due to personal circumstances, one of the contractors was forced to leave the program in early August. The remaining two contractors worked as a team until the season's end on September 30, 2001. A standard workweek was approximately 6 hours per day for 4 days a week, Friday through Monday, throughout the season.

B. Training

TeamOCEAN contract staff received three full days of training in the week prior to beginning interpretive work on the water. Two days of "classroom" training, coordinated and presented by MBNMS Education staff, provided in-depth coverage of MBNMS programs, regulations, resources, and natural history, with emphasis on the marine mammals and seabirds commonly seen from kayaks. TeamOCEAN goals and operations as well as interpretive skills were also covered. A presentation by NOAA Enforcement thoroughly clarified regulatory interpretation and enforcement, on-water reporting procedures, and the role of the kayaking staff as educators rather than enforcement officers. Guest speakers from the U S Coast Guard and the Monterey Fire Department provided essential information on proper marine communications, general marine emergency and rescue procedures, and local marine hazards.

One day of training was dedicated to kayak paddling and rescue skills. This ensured that all TeamOCEAN members were confident and competent paddlers and able to rescue each other or themselves in the case of capsizing. The on-water class was donated by a local kayak skills training company.

C. Success on the Water

TeamOCEAN's first day on the water was August 4, 2001. The team worked thirty days from the start to the finish of the program on September 30, 2001. They put in a total of 328 person hours on the water. Work was split between the two most heavily kayaked areas within the MBNMS: Monterey's Cannery Row (55% of TeamOCEAN's hours) and Elkhorn Slough (45% of TeamOCEAN's hours). One day was spent assessing the potential impacts to Sanctuary resources in the Santa Cruz area. The information obtained indicated a relatively low kayak use there and the team did not revisit Santa Cruz during this season.

The two TeamOCEAN contractors worked as a team in a single location (Monterey or Elkhorn Slough) each day. TeamOCEAN staff found that kayakers responded more comfortably when approached by one rather than both Team members, and also learned that certain otter rafts or seal haulouts could be interpreted and protected from disturbance most effectively when one Team member positioned himself an appropriate distance away and intercepted approaching kayakers in a docent-like manner. Therefore the team often split up to individually contact different groups of kayakers. The team normally stayed within visual contact of each other for safety reasons but also carried VHF marine radios to facilitate communications. The team was issued one cellular phone to allow contact with shore-based enforcement or rescue personnel. The team discovered that it was advantageous for both members to have cellular phone accessibility and one team member used his personal cellular phone. Additionally, this team member noted that his use of a cellular phone ear jack enabled him to keep his hands free while he made a report and reduced the likelihood of losing the phone overboard.

Records kept by TeamOCEAN staff while on patrol show that each day they successfully educated ocean kayakers about the Sanctuary and its resources while heading off potential disturbances of sensitive wildlife. A total of 1,235 kayaks were contacted over the course of the season. Assuming that the contacted boats were an equal mix of single and double kayaks, we estimate that 1,850 individual kayakers received a Sanctuary message from our TeamOCEAN personnel. This number represents only those interactions where some substantial information was communicated about the Sanctuary or the area's natural history. Many interactions were lengthy conversations, and most involved answering questions posed by the kayaker(s). This equates to an average of 3.8 kayaks contacted per person hour on the water, or 5.6 individuals contacted per person hour on the water. On weekend days the contact rate was high, and very similar between Monterey and Elkhorn Slough, while on Fridays and Mondays fewer people were out to interact with, and Elkhorn Slough's contact rate was noticeably lower than Monterey's.

On Monterey's Cannery Row, TeamOCEAN provided daily interpretation and protection of rafts of resting sea otters, hauled-out harbor seals, and California sea lions resting in the water or on the breakwater. The team also enlightened uninformed kayakers about boating lanes and collision hazards within the Monterey Harbor and about off-limit areas such as the beach at Hopkins Marine Station. In Elkhorn Slough, TeamOCEAN provided interpretation and protection of skittish harbor seal haulouts and rafts of resting sea otters, as well as natural history information about the many seabirds

there. The team also discouraged kayakers from landing on and trampling mudflats and sensitive pickleweed marsh habitat, or from entering off-limit or hazardous side channels.

While TeamOCEAN's primary goal was community education, the staff also collected valuable information for the MBNMS Pilot Enforcement Program about the types of disturbances and problems occurring in popular kayaking locales, and informed local enforcement personnel of potential violations. Some of the disturbances reported by TeamOCEAN this season include pedestrian disturbance of sea lions on Monterey's Fisherman's Wharf, motorboat disturbance of sea lions near the Monterey breakwater, harassment of sea lions by surfers in Santa Cruz, feeding of sea otters and gulls at the Moss Landing Harbor, and numerous instances where harbor seal haulouts were disturbed or flushed by kayakers and motorboats in Elkhorn Slough. In each of these cases, TeamOCEAN staff contacted local enforcement to report the disturbance, and, when possible, contacted the responsible persons in an educational manner. Additionally, TeamOCEAN staff made several educational contacts a day with kayakers who had approached far too close to sea otters and harbor seals, and thus likely prevented many more disturbances. Twice, oil sheens along Cannery Row were reported to authorities, and team members regularly removed trash from the water, including a container of a suspected hazardous substance from Elkhorn Slough, which was later transferred to Department of Fish & Game staff. The team also assisted the Marine Mammal Center in locating and rescuing an emaciated sea lion.

D. Summary

In our opinion, this summer's TeamOCEAN Kayaker Education Program was a resounding success. First, the program had undeniable resource protection benefits, through prevention of numerous marine mammal disturbances as well as information collection for the MBNMS Pilot Enforcement Program.

Secondly, TeamOCEAN was a strong education and outreach success. Ocean kayakers are certainly a populous user group that MBNMS Education programs have largely overlooked. Based on wildlife disturbances documented by TeamOCEAN and reported to the Sanctuary in recent years, they are a group who need better information on the regulations protecting wildlife and acceptable wildlife-watching etiquette. The personal, face-to-face contact with Sanctuary users, which sets this program apart from most MBNMS outreach strategies, is known to leave people with a stronger and more lasting memory of the message being communicated. So, while there are several alternative methods for communicating wildlife-watching messages to ocean kayakers (e.g. brochures, training videos, laminated cards attached to rental kayaks), we believe a personalized "docent-like" on-water approach provides the most effective and best-received vehicle for spreading the Sanctuary message. Since this program provides the opportunity for question-and-answer exchanges, it also allows public education in greater depth and on a wider range of Sanctuary topics than the publication-type methods are capable of. This strategy may reach a smaller quantity of individuals but the quality of the contacts is optimized. Furthermore, a positive, personal education experience carries with it an increased probability that the message will be passed on to others.

Additional advantages of the TeamOCEAN program include providing a more tangible Sanctuary presence out on the water, and greater Sanctuary visibility to the public, the kayaking industry, and the media. This season's TeamOCEAN was featured

in articles in the Santa Cruz Sentinel and an upcoming issue of the nationally distributed Coastal Services magazine.

Feedback from the kayakers contacted by our TeamOCEAN staff was very positive. The great majority of contacts were extremely pleasant, with many people expressing appreciation for the interesting information team members provided and gratitude that their first contact was a friendly FYI to inform them of what was the “right thing” to do. Many people thanked the team for being there, saying it made them feel that the Sanctuary was being well protected. There were a small percent of kayakers who did not react positively to the interaction when contacted. This minority responded with grouchy replies or flip attitudes and were perhaps embarrassed at being corrected. Businesses and agencies also reacted positively to the program. We received very supportive feedback from the kayak rental shop owners and staff, dive boat operators, Elkhorn Slough Safari staff, and the Elkhorn Slough NERR. Representatives of the national kayak industry (Perception and Kokatat) supported the program by donating boats and gear.

We recommend that the TeamOCEAN Kayaker Education Program be continued next summer and in future years. We would like to see it become a permanent MBNMS program, recognized and appreciated for the resource protection and education benefits it provides to the Sanctuary and the community. Towards this goal, we have several suggestions to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of TeamOCEAN in future years.

II. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEXT YEAR

A. Staffing and Recruitment

First, we recommend that the patrol days and locations remain roughly the same. The on-water season should start on Memorial Day weekend and run until mid-October at both Elkhorn Slough and Monterey. Patrols after Labor Day should be limited to Saturday and Sunday only. A team could work in Santa Cruz one day per month, at most, for expanded outreach to the kayak community and rental shops there. One contractor should be designated as the team leader, and allotted extra paid hours for scheduling, team coordination, and report preparation.

This year’s team members reported that kayaking for four days straight each week, without a weekend off for several months, was tiring and could be burdensome. Having only two available contractors meant that there was no possibility of relief by a substitute. We recommend that the TeamOCEAN crew consist of a minimum of three contractors, two of whom would work each day (Friday through Monday). This system would provide the same level of coverage as this summer’s program at no added expense, yet would allow for the necessary staff rotation and flexibility.

Optimally, a five or six person crew would be best in order to provide consistent and thorough coverage for both Monterey and Elkhorn Slough each week, instead of requiring a single team to alternate between the two locations. This would provide maximum coverage on the water, but would cost double the staff expenses. Additional funds for gear acquisition would also be necessary.

It has been suggested that one way to expand TeamOCEAN’s coverage would be to recruit and train volunteers who would work one or two days per month for the

program. Volunteers would require the same training as paid staff, and would always be teamed with a paid contractor. Some recreational kayakers on the water this summer indicated interest in such a program. We feel this suggestion warrants consideration, but would require a significantly increased commitment of staff time (by MBNMS staff or the lead contractor) to coordinate and maintain the volunteer corp.

In future years, full-time MBNMS staff need to be more closely involved with the contractors to provide better support and communications between the MBNMS office and TeamOCEAN personnel. Scheduling and day-to-day coordination can be left to the lead contractor, but the designated MBNMS staff person should have weekly debriefing meetings with at least the lead contractor, occasional meetings with the entire team, and occasionally join the team on the water to observe and provide guidance. Ideally the designated staff person would be a member of the Education team, since TeamOCEAN is above all else an educational and outreach program. NOAA Enforcement staff should also be involved in the training and as a consultant to the team throughout the season to provide regulatory clarification and to receive, evaluate and process reported violations.

Finally, we very strongly recommend that TeamOCEAN be administered through the Monterey Bay Marine Sanctuary Foundation. The involvement of the Foundation in this Sanctuary education program would allow staff recruitment and hiring to proceed in a timely fashion, necessary to the initiation of a seasonal, time-critical program. It would also permit the necessary staffing flexibility (e.g. team members' summer vacation plans, hiring staff who can only commit to one or two days per week) without the risk of losing obligated funds to unused contract hours.

B. Training

We recommend one additional day of "classroom" training to cover further material identified by this year's team as desirable: state and local enforcement information on closed or limited activity zones, general information on evidence collection, protocols for identifying marine animals in distress and what information to provide to first responders, and introductions to relevant groups such as the ESNERR and The Marine Mammal Center. Team-building activities would also be appropriate. We recommend a second day of on-water paddle and rescue skills training (the standard training course is two days). The initial training should also include introductions to each of the local kayak shops and harbor master offices by a member of the MBNMS staff within the first week of the program. It would be advisable for the MBNMS staff person doing the training to accompany the team on the water for their first few days, for quality control and guidance.

C. On the Water

We have no substantive recommendations for changes to on-water operations in future years, beyond requests for a few additional gear items.

D. Additional Outreach

Ideally, the TeamOCEAN Kayaker Education Program should be considered to include other off-the-water kayaker outreach strategies. Some bear little added expense but require additional staff time, such as proactively giving outreach presentations to all local kayak rental facilities (in late spring) and to regional kayaking groups, such as Bay

Area Sea Kayakers and the Sierra Club. Other ideas require funding, as well as staff time, such as the production of laminated wildlife identification and “etiquette” cards that can be given to kayak shops for attachment to rental boats, or the installation of signage with similar information at popular kayak launch spots. Since the message is primarily in line with NOAA’s Watchable Wildlife project, the MBNMS should consider dovetailing this portion of the program and solicit financial backing from other NOAA offices.

We also propose for consideration the possibility that TeamOCEAN staff could be used for a broader range of resource protection and education projects, beyond kayaking. Occasionally resource issue education needs may arise which a corps of trained docents could appropriately and effectively address. An example, which occurred this summer, was the period of intense bait fishing activity on the Santa Cruz Wharf that led to the entanglement and subsequent rescue of almost 200 brown pelicans in one month. In that situation, knowledgeable Sanctuary docents could have helped to educate fishermen on how to avoid entangling pelicans, and what best to do once it occurred. If similar crises should arise during future TeamOCEAN seasons, the Sanctuary should consider temporarily diverting effort from kayaker education to the more immediate resource protection needs.